



## Heartbreaker: A Novel

*Claudia Dey*

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**The love between a daughter and her mother—and the dark secrets they keep from each other—are at the heart of this wildly imaginative novel that combines elements of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Stranger Things*, and *Twin Peaks*.**

**An isolated town.**

**The remains of a mysterious cult.**

**And a woman who disappears.**

It's 1985. Pony Darlene Fontaine has lived all her fifteen years in "the territory," a settlement founded decades ago by a charismatic cult leader. In this strange town run on a sinister economic resource, the women crimp their hair and wear shoulder pads, and the teenagers listen to Nazareth and Whitesnake on their Walkmans. Pony's family lives in the bungalow at the farthest edge of town, where the territory borders the rest of the wider world—a place none of the townspeople have ever been.

Except for Billie Jean Fontaine, Pony's mother. When Billie Jean arrived in the territory seventeen years prior—falling from the open door of a stolen car—the residents took her in and made her one of their own. She was the first outsider they had ever laid eyes on. Pony adores and idolizes her mother, but like everyone else in the territory she is mystified by her. Billie Jean refuses to describe the world she came from.

One night, Billie Jean grabs her truck keys, bolts barefoot into the cold October darkness—and vanishes. Beautiful, beloved, and secretive, Billie Jean was the first person to be welcomed into the territory. Now, with a frantic search under way for her missing mother, Pony fears: Will she be the first person to leave it too?

Told from the three unforgettable perspectives of a daughter, a killer dog, and a teenage boy named Supernatural, this novel is startling in its humor and wrenching in its wisdom about the powers, limits, and dangers of love. *Heartbreaker* is an electrifying page-turner about a woman reinventing herself in order to survive—and a daughter who must race against the clock to untangle the mysteries left in her mother's wake.

## Advance praise for *Heartbreaker*

"A dark star of a book, glittering with mordant humor and astonishing, seductive strangeness and grace. I am a giant fan of Claudia Dey's wild brain."—**Lauren Groff, author of *Fates and Furies***

"*Heartbreaker* gave me chills all the way through. . . . I floated in the perfection of its ending. I loved this novel's shining sensitivity. I loved its every page."—**Sheila Heti, author of *Motherhood* and *How Should a Person Be?***

## Heartbreaker: A Novel Details

Date : Published August 21st 2018 by Random House

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Author : Claudia Dey

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## From Reader Review Heartbreaker: A Novel for online ebook

### Theresa says

Between 2.5 and 3 stars

Wow, this was a difficult book to rate. If I'm completely honest there are more negatives than positives while I'm sitting here trying to collect my thoughts. But I did finish the book and at no time did I seriously contemplate giving up so it must have held my interest and desire to see how it turned out. So for that one seemingly tiny thing is the reason it's getting the 3 stars instead of lower.

What I didn't like~

\* The dialogue was cheesy. I know this was supposed to be a cult trapped in the far Northwest who are stuck in the 80's but that is NOT the problem. It's the sentence structure and not being able to tell who said what a lot of times

\* The book skipped around so much I had trouble keeping the timeline straight. From paragraph to paragraph within a section the timeline could change every single time. I had trouble keeping it all straight. (Maybe I didn't much care?)

\* There was not enough focus on the cult like setting. I wanted to know more about the town and their customs. We did get a bit of that but it wasn't enough to conceive a clear picture.

However, I did like that interesting concept of the storyline. I thought it was fun to imagine a group of people essentially lost in the 80's. I just wish it had been more organized and more descriptive of the setting.

3\* (2.5-3)/3.88

In compliance with FTC guidelines-----I received this book free from a Goodreads Giveaway in exchange for an honest review. The content of this review is not influenced by that fact. The feelings expressed are solely mine. I sincerely appreciate the chance to read and review this book.

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### Susan says

A story told in three parts by three different characters, Pony, the dog and Supernatural, this one is definitely in the realm of weird fiction. From the bizarre cult suspended in the 80's to the hyper-intelligent dog this story is an exercise in mind-bending and suspension of disbelief. It is not a linear, straightforward story as much as a collection of thoughts and feelings. Can someone please tell me how to rig up my antennae so I only receive broadcasts from 1985? I would be immensely appreciative. If I could just skip the next few years and retreat into The Golden Girls and Wham! that would be ideal.

Pony's section was the most confusing and frustrating. The story didn't make much sense to me and I really wanted more in depth and concrete information about the cult and their town. I guess as someone who was born and raised in the cult she likely didn't know anything different and as such likely didn't put too much thought into things that she found commonplace. The story doesn't coalesce into an understandable story-

line until the dog takes over as narrator. Yes, you read that correctly. The dog is remarkably coherent and forthcoming about the town and its people and it is in her section that I felt things started to make sense. The last section is from the viewpoint of Supernatural and his knowledge fills in the gaps to make things more comprehensible.

I have to admit that while I was reading this book I didn't enjoy it very much at all but as I let it percolate in my head for a few days I actually like it a lot more. It has grown on me! I still wouldn't say that I loved it but I have respect for the inventiveness of the author.

Thank you to Random House for providing an Electronic Advance Reader Copy via NetGalley for review.

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### **Kyra Leseberg (Roots & Reads) says**

This book defies genre and logic in so many ways. I was under the spell of 1980's music references, the mysterious location we're never entirely sure about, and the cult-like community we enter.

Billie Jean Fontaine hasn't left her home in almost three months. She abruptly walks out without shoes or a coat on a freezing evening and takes off in the family truck. The community begins to whisper about her absence and though she arrived 17 years ago and became a part of the 'territory', she has remained the outsider.

Billie Jean's story unfolds for us through three surprising narrators. Her dramatic and often heartbreakingly tale is woven into the electric atmosphere of the mysterious territory that is described with vague details that left me with so many questions! From the 1980s pop culture references to the bizarre traditions of the community, I was never sure what was truth and what was fantasy. A sci-fi drama/mystery/dystopia that I can only compare to an alternate reality version of *My So-Called Life* if it had taken place in a cult-like compound in the wilderness in the mid 80's and was directed by M. Night Shyamalan. *Heartbreaker* crosses so many genres but never fits comfortably into one.

Thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for providing an ARC in exchange for my honest review.

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### **Diane Hernandez says**

Great for fans of kooky science fiction, *Heartbreaker* is definitely not for most readers. However, if you are looking for something different, you will love this book as much as I do.

Pony Darlene was born and raised in a cult. Her mother has run off and her dad's nickname is the Heavy. What does a fifteen-year-old need to do to score a boyfriend and eventual husband in this cult? And why does the territory draw blood regularly from all the females?

Wow, the world building here is awesome incorporating Warren Jeff's FLDS with the weird physics of *Stranger Things*. I hate to say more because it is a much better read if you don't know even the basic plot. However, if you are ready for something different, this is it.

I'm happy that a major publisher, Random House, took on such a difficult book to categorize. I can't even say whether this is science fiction, fantasy, paranormal, horror or literary fiction. Judging by the early reviews, you will either hate or love *Heartbreaker*. Personally, I loved it. 5 stars!

Thanks to the publisher, Random House, and NetGalley for an advanced copy.

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### **Brooke says**

This book was nothing like I expected to be, yet it was so much more. It is a bizarre little story, that focuses on the disappearance of Billie Jean Fontaine and is told from three perspectives: the girl, the dog, and the boy. Through these three perspectives, readers can piece together information about Billie's life before the territory, her life in the territory, and the events leading up to her disappearance.

I was absolutely fascinated and captivated by the territory – which is the name of the area that this cult-like group of people inhabit. They have their own customs and rituals, and their own understandings of the world around them and their place in it. I would love to have an entirely separate book that just explores the cult, because I find it so intriguing.

The writing style of the book may be difficult at first, as it is abstract and jumps around a lot. But I think it is well worth the initial struggle. This book won't be for everyone, but I really enjoyed it!

Thanks to NetGalley and Random House for providing me with an advanced reader's copy of *Heartbreaker* in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Kimberley says**

How often have you wanted to simply run away from your life? *Heartbreaker* deals with the story of Billie Jean, who suddenly appeared in “the territory”, and then disappears without a trace 15 years later. This novel was written in three parts, as told by three of the characters: Billie Jean’s daughter, Pony; Billie Jean’s dog, Gena Rowlands; and Supernatural, a teenage boy in “the territory.” From what we can gather, the town was founded by a religious zealot and has been stuck in the 1980s since. No one ever leaves the boundaries of the territory, and there is no contact, essentially, with the outside world.

I loved the writing in this book. Great writing can overcome many things, and Claudia Dey certainly achieves that. Frustrating me was the fact that I truly had no idea where this territory was. I knew it had to be someplace north, but north where? The territory has television, telephones, cars and fuel, but how? Some of the mysteries of this story are never explained, and perhaps to some that is charming, but for me it left a lot of unanswered questions. Perhaps part of the charm of this book is not knowing all the answers.

Even with the unanswered questions, I did enjoy this book. The story was interesting, that in this day and age a group of people could be so isolated in a place like North America. The characters were written in a way that truly allowed a visualization of their looks, and a depth that made them whole. Pony is a teenage girl, going through her own awakening and teenage strife, that reminded me of my own teenage years. Supernatural is a boy/man looking for answers in a world that doesn't really have any. Billie Jean is clearly damaged, but why? Dey's writing keeps the pages turning so that you can find the answers.

This is not a love story, though parts of it are. This is not really a thriller, though there are revelations and mysteries to the story. This is a story about running away and starting your life over again, when you simply cannot face things that have happened in your past.

At the end of this book, I found myself wanting more. I wanted to keep turning the pages and learning more about these people. That is evidence of a good story. I think Dey has a winner here, and in reading this book, I am going to read some of her previous work. If it is quirky and unusual like this book, I am sure to enjoy it.

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### **Rochelle Allison says**

This book. THIS BOOK! I had no idea what I was in for when I started it. All I knew is that it was kind of a mystery set in the '80s...

Heartbreaker begins with teenager Pony Darlene ruminating on the disappearance and life of her mother, Billie Jean. We see life through Pony's eyes: her mysterious mother, her stoic father, the super-80s characters of the town...But the magic of this book isn't with the plot, *per se*, though that was as complex and expertly woven as a beautiful, colorful quilt...but with the storytelling itself. I have never read a book like this. Dey's voice is quirky, unique and, at times, confusing. I had to go back and read certain passages, peeling back the layers of what had just been said, but it was so worth the effort.

This book won't be for everyone. Doubtless, some will find it too strange, too weird, too out there. For me, though? One of my favorite books of the year. It was SO REFRESHINGLY DIFFERENT. There's something seductive about this kind of weirdness: it piques the interest, makes you feel like a voyeur into a setting so different it may as well be extraterrestrial (The Territory was a character itself), and then shows you how similar you are to these people. The love, the secrets, the thought processes...we all do this stuff. Or at least, we do and think things like them.

I know this review is rambling and vague, but it's because I don't want to give anything away. There were a few reveals...one I suspected, but I think it's because I was meant to, and it rose and crested like a wave. So good. The other was also suspected, and low-key. Heartbreaker is divided into three parts, and even that caught me off surprise. I don't want to ruin any surprises for anyone. This story's like mining for gold and finding thousands of diamonds. The end made me smile and tear up a little. I rooted hardcore for Pony, Supernatural, The Heavy and Billie Jean.

Thanks to Netgalley for the ARC!

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### **Creager says**

Heartbreaker is the youthful wisdom of Pony Darlene Fontaine because as shocking as her mother's mythical arrival to the compound in a Mercedes Sedan was; Billy Jean Fontaine's departure is just as random and chaotic. Pony lives in area called The Territory, with 80s rock icons and S.E. Hinton names, where Red Dawn really happened...I don't know but I want to find out. But then there's Claudia Dey's fragmented time lines of past and present storytelling. While the novel is catchy in theme, mysterious in delivery it is simultaneously gobbledegook and incoherent, written with diabolical flash imagery and hundreds of one-line quotable epiphanies, in a make or break world Heartbreaker can easily be set aside.

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## **Susan says**

Thank you to Random House for an ARC of Heart-Breaker by Claudia Dey in return for an honest review, embargoed until the publication date: August 21st, 2018

Heartbreaker is the most character driven book I have read, possibly ever. Here's the kicker. One of the most essential characters is the setting of the book: The Territory. Turning the setting, remnants of an cult in the 1980s, down to one original member, into an essential character of the book is no easy task but Dey does it without skipping a beat. She does it by using the Territory to fill the spaces between heartbeats with a chilling frost that doesn't let go and keeps you guessing until the end.

Three narrators. Three completely different voices that introduce you to each other, other main players and The Territory through unique lenses all their own that sometimes compliment, sometimes contradict and sometimes, you wish, could be held through a panel discussion because it would heal so many hurts.

First is, The Girl, Pony. The daughter of one missing mother, Billy Jean and her stoic father, "The Heav". Pony is realistic, somber, wants more, wants out, had enough, has a plan, it has been too much, this is the reality of the territory mixed with bits of daydreams gone by from her mind, heartbreaks, and hopes she can't keep away about her mom that keep you guessing, keep you wondering, turning the page for more because there are so many gaps and guesses in what she doesn't know.

Second is The dog of Billie Jean, The Heav and Pony. At once bewildered at being left behind the night Billie Jean disappears, unnervingly certain in her knowledge of the Territory's origins, prosperity and current state of existence, as well as the crypt keeper of everyone, and everything's secrets. The dog has managed to be the only thing that has not made or kept any don't ask, don't tell vows that bloom throughout the territory. And the dog tells all... of course as you keep reading, you again find, it is through her lens and point of view, which means there is more to come from yet another lens that will shed more light through this intricately woven tapestry. And while she might know secrets of the past and more than most, she has no doesn't know the one thing everyone is trying to figure out- where did Billy Jean disappear to that October evening?

Third is The Boy, Supernatural. The heartthrob of the territory. The boy every girl wants to marry. Mostly he expresses a lot of regret for mistakes he makes with relationships with his family. Throughout Pony and Supernatural's telling of events there is a protective but distant acquaintance about them. As secrets unravel the Territory's existence when Billie Jean disappears, and he learns how many secrets were kept from him, even more than the ones he regretted keeping from others, Supernatural starts finding a path to things that were always missing from his life, and filling holes in the lives of others.

Together, along with a cast of some charismatic, some helpless and hopeless and some broken they walk you through the Territory as if you just moved in or just got lost and wondered by, introducing you to all the locals... famous or infamous hoping to make it sound more enticing than predatory, hoping to keep you around. Truly there's no keeping down that creepy void threatening to engulf you with a quickness that is telling you to run.

Dey toes the line between clues and madness that are deftly interwoven through flashbacks and current time throughout Heart-Breaker with the precision of a surgeon. Without close attention essential Easter Eggs can be dismissed as perception, mental delusion or just dismissed as off-handed comments that later come back

to haunt you and the rest of the characters. Dey proves her talent for being sharp witted, sarcastic, and with a mind for pop-culture references. While singing the likes of Def Leppard, Bruce Springsteen and Air Supply, you will root for these characters, even in their ugliest moments, right up to the last page reveal.

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### **Mr. Cochran says**

Dey's Heartbreaker takes place in an unconventional community (to say the least) and is written... well, unconventionally. The disappearance of Billie Jean, an oddity in an already eccentric, cult-driven society severely separated from civilization, is explored through three very different narrators. No one ever leaves, but of course Billie Jean was the first "outsider" taken in by this community and has never quite fit in, so who knows what her capabilities are.

There are a few things I think Dey does extraordinarily well. The town itself is so beautifully bizarre and as the story progresses it reaches new levels of absurdity. Its residents' customs are unsettling. There is so much originality in this twisted society's conception, which helps create intrigue for the mystery itself.

There's a deep sadness lurking just under the surface of all of Dey's characters. One of Heartbreaker's narrators explains, "The love for your baby comes with something dark. It comes with death. When you look at your child for the first time, you feel the presence of death. How death is looking at your child too. That is why you don't sleep. Not because of the child, but because you are watching over her. Keeping death away. It is death that keeps you up. Not the child." These hauntingly insightful moments reveal a certain depth to many of this book's characters that makes it is easy to become invested in the storyline.

Personally, this book was initially difficult to get into. It jumps timelines so frequently that it is challenging keeping track of what is happening and when it is happening. I eventually got used to this, but the first fifty pages felt like work.

I think another reason I struggled getting into Heartbreaker is that Billie Jean's daughter, the first of the three narrators, was my least favorite. I wasn't as invested in the mother-daughter relationship as I was the other relationships developed later in the story; in retrospect, for me it felt like this section of the book's only purpose was to introduce us to the setting/plot, and I don't feel it did a great job of doing so.

Speaking of the the narrators, I think it is fair to say that one of them felt a bit... gimmicky. Another problem I had with this approach to telling the story is that despite being completely different, each narrator was written pretty similarly. The stream-of-consciousness style of writing felt like it would have worked better with just one character rather than all three.

Despite the ending feeling a little rushed to me, the mystery and the overall idiosyncrasies of Dey's setting and characters was more than enough to keep me invested.

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### **Kaytee Cobb says**

This story is told in an interesting way. From three different points of view (the girl, the dog, and the boy), we gradually piece together the life of Billie Jean Fontaine, mother of Pony, wife of The Heavy, and resident of The Territory, a secluded outpost with cult like beginnings way out in a desolate frontier. I picture

unsettled Alaska, perhaps? because it's freaking cold there for so much of the year. So little is introduced at the beginning of this story that you're left piecing together not just Billie Jean's life, but the entire setting from the ramblings of "the girl", moving forward and backward in time. Once you wrap your head around it (I'd say that happens around when the dog takes over the narration), the story flows, but it may be difficult to let yourself get that far in.

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### **Diane S ? says**

Dnf at 20% There may be brilliance somewhere here, but if so I can't find it. Have no idea what I just read. Definitely not the book for me.

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### **Angie says**

This one kind of defies categories. Kind of historical, the characters think they live in the 80s, they don't. No one knows until the end where they are. There are three parts, one narrated by a girl, one by a dog, and one by a boy. The dog seemed to have the best insights. Basically, it's about community and family and how claustrophobic these can be.

Thanks to the publishers for the advanced copy.

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### **Simon says**

May end up being a five star book. Need it to settle a little.

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### **Kyra Leseberg (Roots & Reads) says**

This book defies genre and logic in so many ways. I was under the spell of 1980's music references, the mysterious location we're never entirely sure about, and the cult-like community we enter.

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For more full reviews, visit [www.rootsandreads.wordpress.com](http://www.rootsandreads.wordpress.com)

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